

In the fall of 2002, when Congress debated a resolution on the use of U.S. Armed Forces against Iraq, I offered an alternative war resolution - one with some definitive conditions. My resolution required the President to provide Congress with a comprehensive plan for the long-term cultural, economic, and political stabilization in a free Iraq before committing U.S. Armed Forces to a war with Iraq.

When I presented my resolution, I said, "The young men and women of our armed forces are already fighting a war on terrorism. Before we expand their role, and send them even deeper into harm's way, I want assurances that we have a plan for maintaining stability in the region once we declare victory." The bill ultimately approved by Congress authorizing the President to use our armed forces against the threat posed by Iraq did not include the preconditions that I introduced. I can only imagine what Iraq and the Middle East would look like today if Congress had passed my resolution instead.

When I voted against using troops in Iraq, I believed then - and still believe today - that this was not a war of necessity, but rather a war of choice and convenience. As we have learned since that vote, my concerns were indeed justified.

The Bush administration lied about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and skewed our intelligence to mislead the international community, members of the House, and the American public. There was not a path to victory. It was a path of deceit.

President Bush wrongfully rushed our nation into war not considering that military action is rarely, if ever, in a nation's best interest. The decision to send our troops into battle should always be a last resort.

Unfortunately for our country, this war has come at great expense. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, more than 4,400 American soldiers have died, and more than 32,000 Americans have been wounded. Furthermore, Congress has already committed more than \$800 billion to this effort and will likely be asked to appropriate tens of billions of dollars more.

I have received numerous letters from family members of deployed active and reserve troops.

They keep asking me a question that I am unable to answer: “How much longer are our troops going to be deployed?” While President Obama has officially ended combat operations, tens of thousands of troops remain in harm’s way.

In 2009, I introduced H.R. 578, the *Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act of 2009*

. My legislation addresses the refugee crisis and potential security breakdown resulting from the mass influx of Iraq refugees into neighboring countries, and the growing internally displaced population in Iraq, and also facilitates the resettlement of Iraqis at-risk. There are still many Iraqis who are currently displaced within their own country and in neighboring states such as Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon. The United States must be a leader in encouraging the international community to focus on this humanitarian crisis, recognize it for the potential security threat it poses, and take steps to alleviate the suffering of Iraqi refugees.

Furthermore, in May 2010, the House of Representatives passed an amendment that I introduced to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011. My amendment addresses the plight of Iraqis who have worked for the United States in Iraq and whose lives have been placed in grave danger for their service. In particular, my amendment requires the Department of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State, Attorney General, Secretary of Homeland Security, Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and heads of other appropriate Federal agencies (as determined by the Secretary of Defense) to produce a needs assessment of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis and their status. My amendment also requires the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Homeland Security to develop a plan using the needs assessment to expedite resettlement of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis at risk as the United States withdraws from Iraq.

There are still many unanswered questions concerning Iraq's future. We have a lot of work to do and I am looking forward to working with my colleagues in Congress and with President Obama towards a detailed and comprehensive plan for what we can expect in the coming months and years. At the very least, we owe this to U.S. troops, their families, the American taxpayers, and our allies.